

INSIDE



TRACKS

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Contract Bear Warden Keeps on Trappin'

"Hello, this is that lean, mean machine and retired game warden, Dave Wedum: lover, fighter, wild horse rider, pie baker, bear trapper, and windmill man. If you need these or any other services, please leave your name and number at the tone."

The message on Dave Wedum's answering machine sums up the man: he is a wild combination of brashness, sensitivity, vitality, and humility. He loves grizzly bears and golden retrievers. He is philosophical, yet blunt, and he seems to enjoy life more than anyone should.

"I love to work with bears," said Wedum. "It gives me a chance to help people, educate them about bears, and do something for the animal. Grizzlies are the most magnificent animal we have. They are absolutely beautiful."

Wedum works on contract for the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) in Region One as the region's bear warden. He held various jobs for the Department around the state, and retired as a game warden in the Whitefish area in 1989. He has trapped and moved hundreds of black and grizzly bears.

Wedum feels that grizzlies have received a bad rap. "There's a lot of bear

phobia around, partly the fault of the media," he said. "They sensationalize everything bad that happens. When you consider the number of grizzlies we have, and the number of people who live in grizzly country, it's amazing we have so few incidents. We have bears passing through residential areas, and people don't even see them. The vast majority of bears avoid problems."

Wedum acknowledges the limitations of trapping and relocating bears. "It's not a great alternative, but then there are very few options available," he said. "It's a 50-50 chance, but there's little else you can do. An individual grizzly has an enormous value because of the species' low reproductive rate and shrinking habitat. But sometimes, for the good of the population, it's necessary to remove an individual bear if the bear continues to get into trouble. Then we have little choice but to kill the individual; zoos are just not taking wild grizzlies."

Wedum cites a study done by wildlife biologists Shawn Riley and Rick Mace showing that only young female grizzlies have a better than even chance to avoid further trouble after being relocated. Wildlife Manager Jim Cross contends that habitats in northwest Montana may be reaching the saturation point for grizzlies, making it difficult to find areas to move bears where they will no overlap the home ranges of other (continued on page 3)



IN THIS ISSUE

- CONTRACT BEAR WARDEN KEEPS ON TRAPPIN'
- BOYS WHO REPORTED PERCH RELEASE RECEIVE AWARDS
- HUNTING HERITAGE SYMPOSIUM A SUCCESS
- STUDENTS WORK ON STATE PARK IMPROVEMENTS



GRIZZLIES and Golden Retrievers are two of Dave Wedum's favorite animals. One he traps; the other he trains.

Wedum, a retired MDFWP warden, now serves as contract bear warden for Region One.

He worries that the grizzly population may be reaching the saturation point in the ecosystem: habitat is shrinking because of increasing human presence.

Boys Who Reported Perch Release Receive Awards

Chris Loraas of Hot Springs and Mike Vetter of Columbia Falls each received \$500 and other awards for their parts in reporting an illegal perch release in Lake Mary Ronan.

On May 31, the boys saw a man dumping something in the lake near the outlet. At first the boys thought the man was dumping garbage, but when they investigated they saw that he had released live perch.

"We had read a newspaper article on illegal fish introductions a few days earlier," said Vetter. "So we were mad when we saw what the man had done." With the help of their brothers Harold and Tom, the boys netted about 33 perch. Many perch escaped when they slipped through the mesh of the landing net the boys were using.

The boys then hurried to Camp Tuffitt and with the help of Jerome, Gary and Mark Thomas, contacted FWP wardens. The man eventually plead guilty, was fined, lost his fishing privileges, and may be responsible for the cost of future remedial efforts on the lake.

The Lake Mary Ronan fishery is one of the most valuable in the state, with an estimated annual value of four million dollars. The lake is also the state's largest source of kokanee eggs. Biologists are uncertain if the perch will survive to cause problems with the lake's excellent trout and salmon population.

"The quick action of these boys reduced the potential for future problems," said Jim Vashro, Region One Fisheries Manager. "They are real heroes—they did just the right thing."

The boys' action was a family affair. "We spend almost five days a week on Lake Mary Ronan during the summer," said Connie Vetter, Mike's mother. "We all helped because we really love the lake."

"We've had a huge amount of positive comment," said Teri Loraas, Chris's mother. "People are pleased and proud of these kids. It's nice to see good publicity about good kids for a change."

The awards were presented to the boys on August 21 at the FWP headquarters in Kalispell by Region One

Supervisor Dan Vincent, Steve McGuire of Montana B.A.S.S. Federation, and Trout Unlimited representative Rick Smith. These organizations plus Wall-eyes Unlimited provided the monetary and other awards. The boys were particularly pleased with yellowstone cut-throat trout belt buckles presented by Trout Unlimited. These and other organizations had recently signed a cooperative agreement to provide monetary awards to discourage the illegal introduction of fish.

Both boys plan to save most of the money they received. "I'm going to invest in a savings bond, and give some

of the money to my little brother Tom," said Mike Vetter. Chris Loraas remarked that he will also save most of his money. When asked if he will give some money to his brother Harold, Loraas replied, "I suppose."

In letters to the boys, FWP Director K.L. Cool wrote: "This is the first conviction for an illegal fish introduction in Montana, and it would not have been successful without your contribution. Hopefully, your efforts will prove to be an inspiration for others and a deterrent to this kind of activity in the future." 🐟

AWARD RECIPIENTS.

Mike Vetter and Chris Loraas hold their awards as they are joined by their mothers, Connie Vetter (left) and Teri Loraas (right) as well as brothers Tom Vetter and Harold Loraas (kneeling).

Mike and Chris each received \$500 for their parts in reporting an illegal perch release in Lake Mary Ronan. The four brothers were able to net about 33 of the illegal perch, reducing the potential for future problems.



Northwest Montana Fair FWP Raffle Winners

Below are the winners of the FWP raffle at the NWMT Fair. Over 2,000 contestants took a quiz on state parks, fisheries or water safety to enter the raffle.

1. Eric McLaughlin, 14 years old, Hungry Horse—Fishing Pole
2. Robin Van Winkle, 8 years old, Yellow Bay—Fishing Pole
3. David Hunt, 6 years old, Bigfork—Pellet Gun
4. Peter Jostrom, 11 years old, Kalispell—life preserver donated by Sportsman/Ski House.
5. Skyann Kelly, 7 years old, Somers—life preserver
6. Kathryn De Jana, 10 years old, Kalispell—life preserver donated by Sportsman/Ski House.
7. Michelle Willard, 14 years old, Columbia Falls—ring buoy donated by Snappy's Sport Senter.

Hunting Heritage Symposium a Success

More than 500 people from 32 states and three Canadian provinces attended the Governor's Symposium on North America's Hunting Heritage held in Bozeman from July 16-18. Hunters, landowners, wildlife professionals, writers, media people and others discussed hunters' contributions to wildlife conservation, the morality and ethics of hunting, demographics of hunters, economic benefits, and the image of hunters.

Attendees learned that hunting will contribute \$14 billion to the U.S. economy in 1992, and that hunters contribute \$3 million per day toward wildlife and wildlife habitat through the purchase of licenses and taxes on sporting equipment.

Richard Nelson, author of the introspective "The Island Within," noted that humans have hunted on the continent for 30,000 years, and that humans have operated as predators and coexisted with wildlife species. "Everyone who sits down to a meal, even a vegetarian meal, participates either directly or indirectly in hunting. Deer

quotas all across the grain belt of this country are established to protect crops."

Philosopher Ann Causey and Theologian Ted Vitali explored the morality of hunting. "Can we kill and still claim reverence for life?" asked Causey. It



PHILOSOPHER ANN CAUSEY: "Can we kill and still claim reverence for life? The modern hunter must not shrink from addressing this and other tough questions."

was pointed out that Native Americans did just that for thousands of years. Many speakers, including Vitali, asserted that hunting is morally acceptable, and that humans as predators are a vital part of the biotic community.

Media representatives and others discussed the demographics and image of hunters. Participants were urged to encourage more youth, women, and minorities to consider hunting. Another major theme was the need for hunters to emphasize ethics and police their own ranks.

In his closing remarks at the symposium, Governor Stan Stephens emphasized that all groups interested in hunting heritage must work together to ensure its future. "I'm very proud that Montana has taken the lead in organizing this symposium. We've planned this as an annual event, and I'm confident that other states will build on what we started here."

Stephens outlined action items that will be pursued, and announced that the 1993 Governor's Symposium on Hunting Heritage will be hosted by South Dakota.

Contract Bear Warden (continued)

(continued from page 1)

bears. Cross also notes that the increasing presence of humans in the ecosystem increases the chances of continued bear/human encounters.

The notion that grizzlies fear humans is false, contends Wedum. "I don't think grizzlies have a fear of man," he said. "Bears just avoid confrontation. They decide that the confrontation isn't worth their time. If you see a bear on a trail, the bear might run, but your heart will be beating faster than his."

Wedum feels this explains why grizzlies often return to an area where they were trapped, or enter traps several times, even though the trapping and handling experience must be very unpleasant for them. The experience, he contends, does not seem to act as a deterrent.

Wedum feels that hunting the grizzly favors the grizzly population. "The act of humans stalking grizzlies and

acting as predators, and killing some grizzlies, may condition the bears to avoid humans," he said. "Whether or not the bear is hunted, we seem to remove about the same number from the population."

The two bears that stand out in Wedum's long career are the infamous Geifer Creek Grizzly in 1976, and the grizzly that mauled former Warden Captain Lou Kis in 1987. "Almost all the grizzlies I've handled were as gentle as could be," said Wedum. "But those two weren't. The bear in 1987 was the nastiest I've seen. He was very violent in the trap. All he wanted to do was get out and kill something. It was the only bear I've worked that I thought should be shot on the spot."

Wedum plans to continue his work with bears indefinitely. Between his wildlife work, position as marshal at the Whitefish Lake Golf Course, other endeavors mentioned in the recording on his answering machine, and his dog

training, he has little time to sleep.

"I need all these jobs because of the money I spend on my retrievers," said Wedum. "Dogs are one of the top passions in my life. Dogs are family; unless you're a dog person, you can't understand it."



Students Work on State Park Improvements

A cooperative project between Northwest Montana Human Resources and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks has provided summer jobs for young people and positive improvements in the Region's state parks.

A crew of six high school students, led by Human Resources Representative Kathy Warne, completed a variety of maintenance jobs at West Shore State Park and built a hiking trail at Lone Pine State Park.

"The project has been a good learning experience for these kids," said Warne. "They've learned the responsibility of working a job in the real world and collecting a paycheck."

The six students involved in the program attend high school in Kalispell or Columbia Falls. "Sometimes we had to push each other to keep motivated," said Jessica Barker of Kalispell. "It was exciting, though. I learned a lot



COOPERATIVE CREW. Forming the crew for the Northwest MT. Human Resources and the FWP are Dawn DeBarros, Jessica Barker, Marie Tourtelotte, Kathy Warne (Human Resources Representative), Kevin Kaponen and Tim Bridwell.

about outdoor work—I could make my own trail now if I wanted to."

Tim Bridwell agreed that the work was hard, but rewarding. "Instead of sitting on our behinds, we're out here working them off," he said.

The students are paid minimum wage and outfitted with work boots and rain gear. They plan to use the money

they've made on clothes, school supplies, skis, and savings.

The cooperative work agreement between Human Resources and FWP has worked well, according to Warne. "The students have really hung in there," she said. "They haven't missed an unexcused day of work. They all have good reason to be proud of themselves."

INSIDE TRACKS is published by Region One
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Dan Vincent, Supervisor
Jim Cross, Wildlife Manager
Jim Vashro, Fisheries Manager
Dave Conklin, Parks Manager
Ed Kelly, Warden Captain
John Fraley, Information Officer, Newsletter Editor

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